THE AGILE MINDSET: 18 ATTRIBUTES OF SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS LEADERS, MANAGERS, AND TEAMS

By now, most people in the world are familiar or have heard of the global agile phenomenon. Because of the low barrier to entry, simplicity, and lack of complexity, it doesn't take much effort for the average person to try their hand at agile thinking, values, principles, practices, methods, techniques, and tools. With a little bit of training and certification, perhaps in Scrum, Extreme Programming, Lean-Kanban, Agile Project Management, or even Agile Portfolio Management, one could claim proficiency as an agilist in the bold new global landscape. Yet, other people simply tend to be agile, responsive, efficient, and effective with agile behaviors, in spite of little formal training, indoctrination, or exposure in agile thinking. But, how can this be? Can agile thinking be learned in a textbook, classroom, or project? Is agile thinking more instinctual, natural, or part of one's DNA? Is the ability to be agile done as part of a Scrum or Kanban team? Or, is genuine agile thinking a much deeper, genetic, or often naturally occurring phenomenon, ability, or behavior? Let's examine some of the characteristics of the so-called agile mind, then, "you make the call!"

- **Mo·ti·va·tion** (mō′tə-vā′shən). Energy, excitement, spirit, passion; **To be unusually enthusiastic**

✓ **Self-starter**
✓ **Unlimited energy**
✓ **Won't quit until job done**

One of the top attributes of the agile mind is a person who is highly-motivated. That is, a person who has the energy, drive, and enthusiasm for accomplishing something with a sense of urgency, as though there was no tomorrow. Not just in a single task, job, or activity, but in almost every aspect of their life, whether it is in doing house work, home repairs, yard maintenance, shopping, going to a physician, planning a long weekend or short vacation, etc. Every task at-hand is an opportunity to exceed and no moment should be wasted. Everything is a top-priority, it should be done well, and everyone should contribute to the task at hand. Many people cherry pick and choose their priorities, focus areas, favorite tasks, or areas of their life in which they want to master. However, for the agile mind, every task is to be treated equally and nothing is to be left to chance, delegated, or overlooked.

Result: High-quality output produced on-time.

- **Am·bi·tion** (ăm-bĭsh′ən). Strong desire, eagerness, goal-oriented; **To be achievement oriented**

✓ **Visionary ideas**
✓ **Desires to be leader**
✓ **Wants to rise to the top**

Another major attribute of the agile mind is a person who is extremely ambitious. That is, a person with an extremely strong, relentless, tireless, and unrelenting desire to achieve. Again, not just in the task at-hand, but in each and everything they do. No task is too small or great for the truly ambitious person. Whether the task is administrative, management-oriented, or highly-technical, nothing is too daunting, overwhelming, or beyond the truly ambitious person. Every day, every task, or every activity is an opportunity to excel, show one's unmatched abilities, finish first, or be recognized as the best. There is no second-place, half-heartedness, or arm waving for the ambitious person, only a strong desire to achieve, be the best, and gain recognition for finishing first. There is no "we" in "I" when it comes "ambition" for the person with the agile mind, only me, myself, and I.

Result: Team organized to produce rapid result.

- **Cu·ri·os·i·ty** (kyo͝or′ē-ŏs′ĭ-tē). Inquisitive, probing, investigative; **To be constantly innovating**

✓ **Constantly learning**
✓ **Continuously improving**
✓ **Seeks mastery/perfection**

A key attribute of the agile mind is clearly someone who is very curious, inquisitive, and probing. That is, a person who always wants to learn something new, treats every interaction, moment, and activity as a change to acquire a new skill, or simply wants to add something to their personal repertoire. Whereas, many people are more than satisfied or comfortable with what they already know, or apply themselves to targeted areas of specialization, the person with the agile mind is never satisfied, satiated, or comfortable with their current level of knowledge, skill, and ability at any point in their lives. In many fields, especially athletics, the ideal age in which to acquire a new skill is often as a child or at least at a very young age. Most people consider the notion of an "adult learner" as somewhat of an oxymoron. However, a person with a truly agile mind will continue learning until their last breath.

Result: Users constantly get innovative results.

- **Con·fi·dence** (kŏn′fĭ-dəns). Certain, self-assured, conviction, boldness; **To be certain in one's success**

✓ **Audacity**
✓ **Faith and trust**
✓ **Believes in themselves**

An essential attribute of the agile mind is definitely confidence, assertiveness, and conviction. That is, a person with the audacity, courage, and hutzpah to face into adversity, take on a new challenge, and attempt a complex or seemingly impossible task. For most people, complexity, uncertainty, and size are demotivators, which the fight or flight instinct would tell them to avoid. However, to the person with the agile mind, an overwhelming task to many is just another opportunity to exceed, gain attention, and put another notch in one's belt like an Old West gunslinger. Not only are confident people willing to take on responsibilities that would otherwise strike fear into the heart of most people, but they actually seek out these kinds of challenges. Once the current dragon is slayed, people with an agile mind simply look for another more frightening creature to hunt, kill, and hang on the trophy wall.

Result: Team produces a bold new innovation.

- **Cour·age** (kûr′ĭj). Fearless, bravery, confident, valiant, bold, audacity; **To be able to face opposition**

✓ **Fearless**
✓ **Resolute spirit**
✓ **Willing to move forward**

Another major attribute of the agile mind is courage, which is very similar to confidence. That is, a person who is fearless, brave, and valiant. Whereas, confidence is somewhat rooted in past experiences, successes, and abilities, courage sometimes has no precedence, prior foundation, or successful track record. In other words, a person with courage is willing to take on a new challenge, task, or project with which they have no knowledge, experience, expertise, or prior ability to do. However, to a person with a truly agile mind, lack of prior ability to take on complex new tasks is no obstacle, because they'll not only take on bold new challenges, but they'll convince themselves and everyone around them that they know exactly what they're doing, this is a piece of cake, and no one is better qualified than themselves. As such, blind courage is a common attribute of a person with an agile mind.

Result: Ability to lead others to successful results.

- **Risk-tol·er·ant** (rĭsk-tŏl′ər-ənt). Daring, bold, risky, adventurous; **To be open to calculated risks**

✓ **Counts costs**
✓ **Quantifies benefits**
✓ **Considers probabilities**

One of the most heralded attributes of the agile mind is risk tolerance or the willingness to take calculated risks. That is, a person who is bold, courageous, and valiant enough to take risks. In general, most people are risk adverse, will avoid any type of risk whatsoever, real, perceived, or otherwise. Part of this is fear, lack of courage, or unwillingness to fail in order to save face, appear successful, or certainly not be caught in a moment of weakness, vulnerability, or indecisiveness. However, the person with the agile mind weighs the costs and benefits, is assertive enough to take calculated risks, and even if they fail, understands that the price of failure is education, an opportunity to learn, and succeed on the next attempt. Don't confuse risk tolerance with blind risks, but the person with the agile mind is willing to try and try again until success is eventually achieved, while most people live in fear.

Result: Improves team's ability to succeed.

- **0·pen-mind·ed** (ō′pən-mīn′dĭd). Creative, unbiased, inclined, fair; **To be receptive to new ideas**

✓ **Enjoys variety**
✓ **Open to alternatives**
✓ **Willing to try new ideas**

Another important attribute of the agile mind is being open-minded, which goes hand-in-hand with risk tolerance. That is, the willingness to accept one does not have all of the answers, explore the unknown, and try new things. Whereas most people are satisfied with what they know or do, thinks they have the answers, or is simply jaded by discrimination, prejudgment, or ignorance, the person with the agile mind is willing to accept the fact they simply do not have all of the answers and they're willing to explore new possibilities. Again, most people are risk adverse, perfectly comfortable with the status quo, and will avoid the unknown at any cost. However. the person with the truly agile mind is never satisfied with the status quo, wants to get to the next level of performance, and is constantly seeking new opportunities to achieve bold new heights, possibilities, and exciting new challenges.

Result: Leads to innovation and team resiliency.

- **In·tel·li·gent** (ĭn-tĕl′ə-jənt). Clever, bright, smart, sharp, knowledgeable; **To be apt to master complexity**

✓ **Masters complexity**
✓ **Considers alternatives**
✓ **Makes sound decisions**

An important attribute of the agile mind is intelligence, sharpness, and cleverness. That is, one is particularly smart, able, and

knowledgeable, so adversity, challenge, and impossibility to mediocre people, is just another problem to solve for the intelligent person. In other words, just like a set of complex math problems at the end of each chapter in a mathematical treatise, there simply isn't enough time to solve all of them. But, given enough time, effort, and elbow grease, any challenge is just another math problem that can be solved. Therefore, to the person with the agile mind, any situation, problem, or challenge is solvable with the proper application of elbow grease, effort, or brain power. To the mediocre person, complexity often involves risk, danger, and impossibility, but to the person with the agile mind, complexity is just another opportunity to excel, shine, and succeed even more.

Result: Ability to produce complex innovations.

- **Fo·cus** (fō′kəs). Clear, centered, fixed, sharp, narrow, distinct, concentrated; **To be sharply focused**

✓ **Urgent need**
✓ **Clear objectives**
✓ **Efficient solution path**

An essential attribute of the agile mind is certainly focus, clarity, and singularity of purpose. That is, one has laser sharp vision, clear objectives, and focuses all of their energy upon solving a rather complex problem. It is often said, that a key to entrepreneurial success is peeling back the onion of complexity until one finds the single goal, purpose, or objective that one can focus all of their energies upon. Whereas, most people are willing to take on unbridled complexity, a person with focus understands that solving a problem with a single objective or small set of closely related objectives is the key to success. Therefore, a person with a truly agile mind focuses their attention efficiently and effectively at solving one problem at a time without any wasted motions, energies, activities, or interactions leading to repeated success again and again.

Result: Team efficiently produces exact result.

- **Tal·ent** (tăl′ənt). Ability, competency, skill, gift, expertise, endowment; **To be physically gifted in an area**

✓ **Innate ability**
✓ **Well-developed gift**
✓ **Applies gifts to projects**

One of the essential elements of the agile mind is talent, ability, and skill, which is a no-brainer. That is, a person with special, often innate, natural, or physical abilities to solve complex problems with ease, grace, and a modicum of effort. Whereas, people who are less talented may struggle, be afraid, or simply do not have the ability to solve complex problems, more talented people are necessary to lend a helping hand. Talent often goes hand-in-hand with courage, confidence, and risk tolerance when it comes to taking on new challenges. Oftentimes, the average person does have it within themselves to rise to a new challenge when faced with adversity, is a member of a team or group, and can solve complex problems when necessary. However, the person with the agile mind often has the talent to solve many complex problems again and again with ease, grace, and confidence.

Result: Unique, highly-valued product or service.

- **Tech·ni·cal** (tĕk′nĭ-kəl). Proficient, scientific, technological, specialist; **To possess deep technical skills**

✓ **Highly-skilled**
✓ **Technical abilities**
✓ **Knowledge of technology**

A helpful element or attribute of the agile mind is definitely technical skill, proficiency, and ability, which is closely related to talent. That is, a person with often deep technical, scientific, mathematical, artistic, or other special skills, abilities, and competencies, which are often natural ones. Conversely, people with fewer skills, talents, or abilities may struggle to solve complex problems, take on bold new challenges, or exhibit risk adversity, talented people take on new challenges with ease, grace, and frequency. It is often said that people are either left (analytical) or right (creative) brained, but talent is talent, and people with special abilities often exhibit both analytical and artistic abilities simultaneously. Therefore, it is an important attribute of the person with the truly agile mind to have many simultaneous artistic and scientific gifts, talents, abilities, skills, and other natural endowments.

Result: High-quality output produced on-time.

- **Hands-on** (hănds-ŏn). Participates, helpful, skilled, productive, works; **To be helpful with actual tasks**

✓ **Applicable skills**
✓ **Willing to participate**
✓ **Contributes to activities**

A major attribute of the agile mind is definitely hands-on skills, abilities, and talents, which goes hand-in-hand with technical talent. That is, not only a prior track record of talent, abilities, and accomplishments, but continuing ability to do hands-on work, participate in often development activities, and willingness to chip into carrying the heavy load when necessary. Conversely, less

talented people often gravitate towards administrative, supervisory, and management support tasks, because they have little to no talent, their more talented co-workers often continue chipping into hands-on technical work throughout their careers. Artists are artists, scientists are scientists, and talented people will continue exhibiting their talent throughout their lives, because they are uniquely, often naturally gifted, talented, and competent in a particular artistic or scientific discipline well into their later years.

Result: Helps produce final products sooner.

- **Mul·ti·dis·ci·plined** (mŭl′tē-dĭs′ə-plĭnd). Combine, mix, blend, fuse, synergy; **To be gifted in many areas**

✓ **Multi-talented**
✓ **Polyglot of sorts**
✓ **Builds complex solutions**

One of the lesser known attributes of the agile mind is being multi-talented, which goes hand-in hand with having attributes of being both left and right-brained. That is, a person with multiple analytical or artistic abilities, not just a specialist in one area. Whereas, most people have no special talents or have one or two specialties, a multi-talented person exhibits many simultaneous special abilities, talents, or skills, often throughout their life. Multi-talented people can contribute to many areas of solving complex problems, which include administrative, management, architecture, design, implementation, evaluation, distribution, customer support, etc. The list goes on and on and multi-talented people are often one-person bands. It is said that most people are a mile wide and one-inch deep, but people with a truly agile mind are one mile wide and a foot deep making them truly unique.

Result: Can contribute to product development.

- **Fast** (făst). Swift, quick, nimble, speedy, rapid, flies, brisk, productive; **To be capable of acting quickly**

✓ **Highly-capable**
✓ **Motivated, energetic**
✓ **Does good work quickly**

Another little-known attribute of the agile mind is the ability to complete tasks fast, quickly, efficiently, and effectively. That is, agile thinking is time vs. scope driven, so the ability to produce a fast, efficient, and high-quality result is a hallmark of agility. Whereas, less talented people tend to be scope driven, need a longer period of time to get it right, or are simply risk adverse and afraid to make mistakes, be embarrassed, get something wrong, or simply fail. Oftentimes, less talented people tend to work in groups to spread the risk of failure, harvest the talent of the greater collective, and increase the chances of individual success. However, people with a truly agile mind often have the talent to work alone or in smaller groups, they are fast and efficient, and they simply do not have the patience to slow down the decision-making process with unneeded bureaucracy associated with traditionalism.

Result: Fast, high-quality results people like.

- **Com·mu·ni·cate** (kə-myōo′nĭ-kāt′). Writing, conversation, non-verbal; **To be good at conveying ideas**

✓ **Clear and articulate**
✓ **Appropriate expression**
✓ **Communicates effectively**

The ability to clearly communicate is most certainly an attribute of the agile mind. That is, the ability to ascertain or acquire a problem's scope, efficiently and effectively problem-solve with a small group, and then describe the solution to a customer, end-user, or other key stakeholder. Whereas, lesser talented people simply do not have the communication skills to converse with customers, communicate as part of a team, nor describe what they have done to key stakeholders when it is complete. Exemplary communication skills are the hallmark of people who are highly efficient and effective, because working in an agile way often means communicating with other people in real-time with little wasted motion or effort. Therefore, communication skills are one of the most valuable skills of the person with a world-class agile mind to quickly, efficiently, and effectively solve complex problems.

Result: Teams and products function optimally.

- **Col·lab·o·ra·tive** (kə-lăb′ə-rə-tĭv). Joint, cooperate, team, participate; **To be able to create together**

✓ **Cooperative**
✓ **Unselfish, patient**
✓ **Help someone produce**

One of the top attributes of the agile mind is the ability to be collaborative, cooperative, and work as a team. That is, two heads are better than one and history has proven for millennia that two people can solve problems faster than one person acting alone. Conversely, people working alone take months, years, or decades to solve a problem that a small team can do in only a few short minutes, hours, or days. People have been trying to find the optimal team size ranging from two or three people on up to dozens and sometimes hundreds of people. Miller's limit (seven plus or minus two) has become an infamous guideline for sizing teams

since 1956, although people have been trying to extend this number by dozens on up to hundreds of people. Pair programming became popular in the early 1990s, illustrating that two people can solve problems rather quickly, causing an international uproar. The bottom line is that willingness to collaborate with other subject matter experts is a hallmark of the agile mind.

Result: Rapid, high-quality product development.

- **So·cial** (sō′shəl). Friendly, playful, group-oriented, relational, communal; **To be well-functioning in teams**

✓ **Outgoing**
✓ **Extroversion**
✓ **Likes to work in teams**

A major attribute of the agile mind is social skills, if you accept the theory that collaboration is extremely valuable. That is, it's been proven that teams as small as two people can solve problems dozens of times faster than individuals acting alone, or even extremely large teams bogged down by communication overload. Conversely, even highly-creative and talented individuals acting alone cannot solve problems very quickly, regardless of experience, intelligence, or raw talent. It's often said that necessity is the mother invention, which is sort of a roundabout way of saying one person has to have a need, while another more talented person has to be willing and able to fulfill the need. Hence, the power of teams; where one or more people have a vision, while the remainder of the team fulfills the vision with their raw talent, skill, and energy; makes social skills a key element of the agile mind.

Result: Functions well in a development team.

- **Flex·i·ble** (flĕk′sə-bəl). Pliable, bend, twist, elastic, resilient, adaptable; **To be willing to quickly change**

✓ **Humble**
✓ **Highly-motivated**
✓ **Get the job done quickly**

A forgotten attribute of the agile mind is flexibility, which is the ability to easily change direction in order to converge on a solution. That is, rarely does one have a clear understanding of the correct direction if at all. However, the ability to quickly realize one is going in the wrong direction and have the psychological willingness to change direction is essential to success. Conversely, people and teams who are inflexible may insist upon following a vision, strategy, plan, and implementation, even when they clearly realize there is a better way. Other terms for expressing inflexibility include escalation theory and sunk costs. That is, people insist upon throwing good money after bad, because they simply have the psychological inflexibility to change direction. Therefore, flexibility, adaptability, and the willingness to change direction without looking back is a major attribute of the agile mind.

Result: High-quality product satisfies customers.

Summary

So, what have we learned from this brief, whirlwind, and fast treatise on the key attributes of the agile mind? Well, we've learned that, yes, on one hand agile thinking may have a low barrier to entry, which can be quickly absorbed by reading a book, taking a class, and getting a quick-and-dirty certification. Perhaps, this is why agile thinking swept the globe like wildfire early in the 21st century. On the other hand, we've learned that while it may be possible to exhibit some characteristics of the agile mind as part of a small agile team, it may take much deeper, often naturally endowed abilities, talents, and skills to be truly efficient and effective and yield the benefits of agile values, principles, practices, and tools. Again, maybe this is why agile thinking quickly bogged down, people were mired in a tar pit like traditional thinking, and people started questioning why they were not yielding the promise of agile thinking. More surprisingly, the link between agile thinking and natural talents, abilities, and attributes, like those described here, were not fully understood. During the 1960s, the difference between the best and worst computer programmers was 10,000 to one due to natural abilities. Perhaps, the same is true for agile thinking, and the most efficient and effective agile thinking is a matter of natural ability that cannot be easily acquired from a blog, briefing, book, classroom, or certification.

Further Reading

- Koutstaal, W. (2012). *The agile mind*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Francis, B. (2016). *An agile mind*: *Bootcamp for your brain*. Charleston, SC: CreateSpace.
- Broza, G. (2015). *The agile mind-set*: *Making agile processes work*. Toronto, CA: 3P Vantage.
- Bachrach, E. (2017). *The agile mind*: *How your brain makes creativity happen*. London, UK: Ebury Press.
- Veale, T., Feyaerts, K., & Forceville, C. (2013). *Creativity and the agile mind*: *A multi-disciplinary study of a multi-faceted phenomenon*. Berlin, DE: De Gruyter.
- Rico, D. F. (2017). *Business value of the agile mind*: *18 attributes of successful business leaders, managers, and teams*. Retrieved December 26, 2017, from http://davidfrico.com/rico17i.pdf
- Rico, D. F. (2017). *18 attributes of successful real-world leaders and leadership in today's high-tech organizations*. Retrieved December 28, 2017, from http://davidfrico.com/leadership-attributes.pdf
- Rico, D. F. (2017). *Lean and agile organizational change*: *Innovative models to successfully implement process improvement*. Retrieved December 29, 2017, from http://davidfrico.com/rico17h.pdf

CASE STUDIES IN PEOPLE WITH AN AGILE MIND (*and Not-So Agile Mind*)

Let's examine a few real-world case studies of people with a genuinely agile mind and those who were only wannabes, pretenders, and less-talented people with traditional minds. Oftentimes, as we've alluded to throughout this short treatise, people with a truly agile mind seemed to draw upon naturally-occurring abilities, talents, and abilities deep within their DNA, genetic structure, and psychology. Conversely, other people, in-spite of extensive study, classroom instruction, and even professional certification in agile thinking disciplines, simply could not muster the ability to be agile. This is not to say that people with naturally-occurring agile minds don't need training to hone their skills and formal agile instruction is wasted on less-talented traditional thinkers. In fact, there may be a sweet spot, goldilocks zone, or natural balance to be achieved by training people with instinctual abilities to be agile thinkers as well as those who struggle with traditional thinking.

- **Harry and Dan**. *Let's begin with the case of Harry and Dan. Harry was a fine specimen of genetic breeding. He was tall, handsome, strong, athletic, intelligent, and freakishly motivated. His metabolism was tuned by nature to operate on overdrive throughout his life. He was his parent's favorite child, along with his teachers, classmates, and athletic coaches. He was not only a straight A student, but a star high-school football, basketball, and baseball player as well. Once he graduated from college and entered the workforce, his employer immediately recognized his outstanding intellectual talent and drive. As a young man, he was put in charge of many simultaneous global projects, traveled the world over, excelled at everything he did, completed graduate school, and quickly rose to become a young executive in charge of hundreds of people. Dan, on the other hand, was a little less gifted. He was physically weak, not so bright, struggled in school, not very athletic, not very attractive, and sort of meandered through life from one crisis to the next. Dan went to community college because he was unemployable, eventually got by and graduated, and finally got a job after sending out hundreds of resumes, but not without a struggle due to his poor grades and other obvious weaknesses. At first, Dan tried to substitute a lot of formal training, education, and certifications in traditional thinking as a crutch for his lack of natural talent and abilities, which didn't help very much. Then, Dan discovered agile thinking and once again dove head first into a ton of formal training, education, and certifications in that too, which once again didn't help much. Finally, as fate would have it, Harry and Dan were placed on the same team to develop an enterprise information system for one of the world's largest organizations. Harry insisted upon using his life-long, naturally-occurring abilities to manage the project using pure instinct. The only plan he used was his short-term memory. Dan, on the other hand, insisted the team meet with the customer, interview them, develop and prioritize a product backlog, and chip away at it in an iterative and incremental style. Harry quickly shut that down, forced everyone into believing the only backlog that mattered was his short-term memory and whatever he decided was the highest priority, and anyone who couldn't operate in this style should simply quit the team. After some consternation, the team agreed to follow Harry, the team held daily six-hour standups to get a brain dump from Harry, the team worked off the action items each day, an amazing product was eventually completed, and the customer was very happy with Harry's naturally-occurring brilliance.*

- **Mike and John**. *Let's look at another closely-related case involving Mike and John. Mike was an interesting fellow. He was short, pudgy, and rambunctious. His family didn't have many resources, but what he had was a beautiful mind. That is, he was particularly intelligent, smart, and scientifically-minded. Although somewhat rebellious at times throughout his life, his teachers pegged him as sort of a savant and he exhibited technical skills well beyond his years most of his life. After joining the military, he eventually received some college training, honed some of his technical skills in the field of information systems, rose to become a chief information officer of a high-tech firm, and even taught part-time courses at one of the most advanced scientific research institutions in the Western Hemisphere. John on the other hand rose along more traditional lines, was often slow-tracked by his teachers, obtained formal undergraduate and graduate education early in life, and even obtained formal training and certification in both traditional and agile methods. John was even internationally known as somewhat of a subject matter expert in both traditional and agile thinking, and often taught people how to perform both traditional and agile planning. Well, as fate would have it, after several decades of professional experience, Mike and John would find themselves working on the same team. However, in this case, Mike was the subject matter expert and John was Mike's supervisor, which didn't always go so well, because Mike was known as sort of rebel and prided himself on making life difficult for his supervisors. Mike and John were assigned to work on a bold new scientifically-oriented project that would require some mathematical discipline and quick thinking. Mike immediately began by reading a few scientific articles on the subject, creating a rapid prototype of the algorithm in a few days, and demonstrating the system to the organizational leaders. John, on the other hand, struggled to grasp the technical subject matter, spend more time analyzing the requirements due to the immense complexity, and wondered whether to apply traditional or agile thinking to solving this particular problem. Mike despised any sort of methodical planning, be it traditional or agile, and even chided John for his mastery of agile methods, dismissing them as merely ridiculous. Mike was immediately recognized for his unmatched abilities to do what no one had ever done before, which was to automate a complex mathematical algorithm in only a few days and was appointed to be a technical leader of his customer's organization, while John simply languished in the complexity of the problem.*

- **Brent and Steve**. *Let's examine the case of Brent and Steve. Brent was small and unattractive, but exceptionally bright, quick on the uptake, articulate, and athletic. He joined a high school athletic team and was psychologically dismissed by his coaches for his small frame, but shocked everyone involved by winning a championship event in a large regional state. From this experience, he learned that he was not to be underestimated, he was strong and highly-motivated, and he was extremely intelligent. The confidence of being a star athlete was all he needed to complete his psychological training to succeed at everything he did throughout life. Because his family was poor, he entered the military, where he was placed in a highly-technical discipline, because of his high test scores. He then went on to work for a scientifically advanced organization, all without a college degree. Lack of formal education didn't dissuade him from success, his firms and customers recognized his technical abilities, and he succeeded at whatever he did, rising to manage hundreds of people. He even rose to become a chief engineer of a billion-dollar, decade-long high-tech project. Steve, like Brent, came from a poor family, but that's where the similarities ended. Steve was not so intellectually bright, was not a state champion nor athletic in the least, and was not very confident or psychologically strong. Steve took the more traditional route of earning a formal undergraduate and graduate education, worked on one failed information systems project to another over a period of decades, and even obtained formal training and certification in both traditional and agile methods. As fate would have it, Brent and Steve would find themselves working on the same project. Brent was more of a talker, could listen in on any conversation, quickly devise a solution in his head, and then immediately convince any person in the room that he had the answer with genuine conviction. However, sometimes Brent's instincts and lack of formal planning skills betrayed him when faced with immense information systems complexity. Steve on the other hand, was well-versed in both traditional and agile planning, learned to quickly devise simple plans exhibiting both traditional and agile characteristics with grace and ease, but often lacked the confidence and technical skills to follow through. Immediately recognizing Brent's abilities, Steve invited Brent to be part of his team, gave Brent his plan, put him in charge, and the rest, as they say is history. Brent completed the project using Steve's plans, and like every time before, was recognized for his unique abilities rising to become engineer of the year among several hundred thousand competitors.*